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SUBJECT: ASTANA COMMON WORLD FORUM

11. (U) This is an action message. Mission should approach those involved in planning/preparations for the Common World Forum scheduled in Astana on October 17, and other senior Kazakhstan officials as appropriate, to achieve the objectives at para 3 below.

12. (SBU) Background: The GOK has advised us of plans to hold a Ministerial-level conference, Common World: Progress through Diversity, on October 17 in Astana. Conceived under the umbrella of the UN-affiliated Alliance of Civilizations (AOC), the forum will focus on enhanced communication and cooperation between the Muslim World and the West. A conference planning session is scheduled for August 27-28. The GOK appears eager for high-level USG attendance at this forum, but has not yet been able to advise us on other senior representatives who have confirmed their attendance, nor of the reasons that a number of countries have not been invited. We also have serious concerns with the draft communique the GOK has circulated for comment.

13. (SBU) Objectives:

-- Determine which countries have thus far confirmed their participation, and at what level, for both the August planning meeting and the October plenary. (See para 4.)

-- Clarify why the conference invitation list does not include many nations in the Eurasian core area with which Kazakhstan has full diplomatic relations. (See para 5.)

-- Note USG concerns with the &Alliance of Civilizations,8 and confirm that the conference is not officially under its auspices. (See para 6.)

-- Drawing on the talking points at para 8, obtain GOK agreement to abandon the far-reaching &Astana Declaration8 text it has circulated, and instead propose a much more limited final communique on which all participants will be able to agree. (See para 7.)

14. (SBU) Participation. In light of the Secretary,s inability to attend, we are still trying to determine an appropriate level for U.S. participation. The Kazakhstan Embassy in Washington has been helpful, but has thus far been unable to tell us definitively which countries are coming and at what level they will be represented, both for the October forum and the August master planning session.

15. (SBU) Invitation List. The conference invitation list appears to focus geographically on Eurasia, leaving out South and Central America and sub-Saharan Africa entirely, and thus excluding due to geography many states one would clearly consider &Western8 (e.g., Argentina, Mexico) or &Muslim8 (i.e., only 30 of the 57 OIC states are invited). The USG has no objection to that approach, per se. What is hard to understand is why, given this focus, the GOK has not included countries like Armenia, Israel, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, etc., that are clearly &Western8 in orientation, in the core Eurasia area, and with which it has full diplomatic relations. In addition, the GOK has reached out to

Australasian countries like Australia and Indonesia but not to countries like India, Singapore, etc., that are actually closer to central Asia. The overall impact, perhaps inadvertent, is an exclusion of many countries that share some USG views on interfaith and intercultural relations. Some of these nations are in conflict with neighboring Muslim states, but they often also have moderate, fairly enlightened track records on the rights of Muslim minorities within their own borders.

¶6. (SBU) Alliance of Civilizations. The USG is neither a member of the Alliance of Civilizations<sup>8</sup> (AOC), nor of its Friends Group;<sup>8</sup> as a matter of policy we do not participate in AOC meetings. The AOC is a UN-affiliated initiative launched in July 2005 as an extension of the inter-communal work of Spanish PM Zapatero and Turkish PM Erdogan to respond to the Danish cartoon situation. It has, unfortunately, not developed along positive lines. The report of the AOC High-Level Group, issued in 2006, on which all subsequent work of the group has been based, asserted that three political problems were at the root of the misunderstandings between civilizations: double standards in the promotion of democracy and the application of international law, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict..., and events in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent AOC efforts have been similarly skewed by what is, in essence, an effort to challenge US foreign policy in the broader Middle East. Unfortunately, in addition to references to the AOC in the October conference draft final communique the GOK has circulated, it has also posted on the web (attributed to its Washington Embassy) a statement that the conference is being convened as an integral part of our National Strategy of implementation of the Alliance of Civilizations, our contribution to the latter,<sup>8</sup> and that the conference will meet the goals and spirit of the AOC.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the posting said the GOK will formally report the results of the conference to the AOC Secretariat.

¶7. (SBU) Final Communique. The Astana Declaration,<sup>8</sup> in the current, far-reaching draft the GOK has circulated, includes many elements to which the U.S. is unable to agree. It explicitly or by implication commits states, e.g., to restrict the freedoms of press and expression; acknowledge other governments as democratic<sup>8</sup> irrespective of their practices; support the defamation of religion<sup>8</sup> concept and limit religious freedom; provide debt relief with a preference to Islamic states; support an International Convention on religious tolerance and a Code of Honor for Politicians<sup>8</sup> primarily to counter criticism of Muslim nations; single out the Arab-Israeli conflict as the paramount issue driving apart civilizations; endorse the Alliance of Civilizations and Human Rights Council (neither of which the U.S. is a member), etc. Should the final statement remain in this form, it would call into question the possibility of U.S. participation. Rather than engage in a potentially contentious dialogue on these and other issues, Mission should draw on the following talking points to encourage a much more general final communique on which all participants will be able to agree.

¶8. (U) Begin Talking Points:

-- The U.S. will not be able to sign onto the Astana Declaration.<sup>8</sup> Many of its elements do not match our legal system, foreign policy or cultural practices.

-- A wide-ranging statement of common principles and specific actions like this, for such a diverse group of nations, would probably need years of intensive negotiation, and even then the result would likely be a more focused document, if any at all could be agreed.

-- In the context of a friendly meeting like the Astana conference, we would not want to be placed in a position of having to criticize those with whom we disagree.

-- We would thus propose a fairly brief, straightforward Final Communique<sup>8</sup> in which Conference participants would:

a) welcome intercultural and interfaith dialogue, and support efforts to acknowledge shared values between Islam and other religions throughout the world;

b) encourage efforts to further mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding between religions and cultures;

c) promote people-to-people exchanges and the work of non-governmental organizations to help improve understanding of others, religions and cultures;

d) endorse future meetings like this that focus on common values shared by faiths, rather than as fora for the airing of specific political grievances; and

e) express their appreciation to the Government of Kazakhstan and to the Kazakh people for their hospitality and dedication to advance the principles enunciated above.

-- We do not see a more general final statement to be disadvantageous, since the main utility of a conference like this is to provide a forum where fruitful discussions, both in plenary and on the margins, can occur.

-- In addition, simply getting together in the high-profile venue that the Common World conference offers will underscore internationally, and within the Central Asian region, our collective determination to work together peacefully towards inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding, rather than be driven apart by extremists and those who exploit differences through violence.

-- If asked: We do not think a discussion of the point-by-point objections that we have to the draft declaration, as it stands, would be beneficial or productive, but we are open to discussion of general themes.

End Talking Points  
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